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ABSTRACT

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**Rethinking Policy Directions
for Federal Support of
Educational Research**

by

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ABSTRACT

The author takes the position that supports the basic research which should be increased by the federal government. The suggestion is made that NIE sponsor a mapping of fields of inquiry in education and endeavor to bring patterns for support in line with ongoing inquiry in education. Increased support for providing new research and researchers is considered necessary in continuing the basic research capability in education. In addition, there is a call for expanded efforts in building a national dissemination network.

Rethinking Policy Directions for Federal Support
of Educational Research

There are many reasons for writing a paper like this one. A scholar focusing on the history and politics of federal support for educational research might feel a need to put contemporary policy questions into their historical context.¹ Others, after some frustrating attempts to gain funding from NIE or other agencies of the federal government, might decide to write such a paper as a means toward a more "enlightened" federal posture on educational research. A contemporary and more popular reason, to lament, even condemn, recent attempts by the prevailing political powers to "confuse science with dogma" constitutes another, probably commendable, reason for writing in this area.² These are just a few such reasons.

Before this writer continues, perhaps in the tradition of our colleagues who engage in ethnography, it may be worthwhile to address the issues raised above and their possible influence in the following discussion. About a year ago Patrick Lynch, then President of Division A, asked Yvonna Lincoln and me to write position papers on federal educational research policy, particularly focusing on an AERA stance toward such matters. In his letter to us, he noted that the Governmental and Professional Liaison Committee (GPLC) of AERA now performs AERA's lobbying effort, that little consensus exists among the membership with regard to research policy and that there is a need for each division to stimulate debate about AERA's position as a means of better informing the GPLC and the association about the interests of its membership. While one or two position papers hardly reflect the membership's interests, he felt that such papers and discussions should be part of an ongoing debate. Since I have agreed to write such a paper, to an extent, it seems that I hold a similar view.

Perhaps, that view can and should be construed as a policy suggestion for AERA in and of itself.

Lynch, in his charge to us, went on to note that:

I don't find in the division membership an overwhelming sense of loss at the possibility of NIE's becoming extinct. While I regret that, I also hear from members why so many don't care...According to the members who have testified negatively before a congressional committee concerning NIE...two major complaints were that the grants process is so skewed to a few clusters of individuals who help each other that there are few resources left for able people who are new (or experienced) and are trying to obtain grants. The other serious complaint is that professors, administrators, and teachers can't use the research generated because there appears not to be a good dissemination system.

Like Lynch, I have heard such sentiments from members of AERA, sensing, if not an ambivalence, a lack of enthusiasm about federal support for educational research. I know many colleagues who depend on federal support for their research and development activities, work for which I have much respect. Others, like myself, view the possible presence of such support as reassuring but not necessarily essential in the support of our work. I must confess that when I have participated in the submission of proposals, that resources almost always appear minimal, the competition stiff and the proposal process cumbersome. Reading between the lines of NIE RFP's and program officers' comments, I often seem to sense an implicit ideological style or even zeal that rubs any personal orientation toward disproof the wrong way. Frankly, I have not taken too seriously the "favored few" theory of funding success. It happens, I suppose, to a degree, as in any field of competition, but I suspect proposal-writing and research competence also account for much of the variability in federal support acquisition success.

There is one further topic to be addressed before entering into a discussion of the issues. Some people by virtue of their accomplishments and stature in the field seem to be obvious, authoritative sources to go to for

advice about future directions for federal research policy. Such topics seem to be the rightful domain for the wisdom of those with illustrious records in the field. This type of sentiment probably led to the creation in 1964 of the National Academy of Education and a membership that included such distinguished names as Richard Hofstadter, Roald Campbell, Jerome Bruner, Ralph Tyler, Lawrence Cronbach, Theodore Schultz, William Frankina and Lee Cremin.³ More recently, Educational Researcher continued this tradition by running an insightful series in which presidents of AERA discussed the future of educational research.⁴ The presence of such individuals, their thoughts and leadership, has been, and continues to be, a characteristic of the educational research community that suggests a field that is growing and building its professional capacity.

When I consider my modest prior interest in federal educational research policy and my less than ten years as an educational researcher, Lynch's request that I write this position paper at first seemed out of step with the pattern of consultation and authorship noted above. When I asked him, "Why me?" his response was simply that the policy debate that he called for in his letter and on other occasions should include multiple points of view in the research community, even those from relatively new faces on the scene. Again, my decision to write such a paper suggests to me that I am at least in partial agreement with Lynch about who should participate in policy debate. This may be a policy recommendation in itself for AERA, consistent with the previous call for debate, that such debate structure might deliberately attempt to increase the diversity of points of view among participants, including the insights of the leadership and others in the field. Such structure might tell us more about ourselves and our membership than necessarily increase our wisdom about these policy issues, but both may be possible and worthwhile.

Debate Is No Stranger

Educational research and federal policy, like public education itself, have had a history marked by public vulnerability and often its share of detractors. It is easy to recall the criticism associated with the implementation of regional laboratories, the role Frank Chase and others played in mediating that conflict, even contemporary criticisms based in part on the allegedly noncompetitive basis for the funding of those laboratories.⁵ Recall Edith Green's investigation of USOE in 1967, the audit by General Accounting Office in 1971 which alleged mismanagement and a growing dissatisfaction by researchers in the field over inconsistent handling and review of proposals.⁶ In a contemporary sense similar concerns are not unheard of among educational researchers. NIE, since its inception, has been a target for criticism both from those outside and inside the educational research community. Controversy was certainly no stranger to Edward Curran, recently deposed Director of NIE, during his short tenure in office. Controversy also abounded over the recent decision by NIE director Manual Justy's decision to award a large contract to Harvard University for an Educational Technology Center.

Concern about the quality and productivity of educational research, the competence of educational researchers themselves and occasional self doubt by the research community have yet to point clear policy directions. While Daniel Moynihan played an important role in the development of NIE, it may be worthwhile to recall his earlier view that before NIE research in education had been "inadequate, probably incompetent and certainly disappointing."⁷ David Clark's findings that the median level of research productivity for schools, colleges and departments of education was zero and that a relatively small core of schools and colleges of education accounted for most research and development productivity generated much discussion about the nature of the field.⁸ A recent

NIE Project involving deans of schools and colleges of education and focusing on the research capacity of such institutions seems to at least in part affirm Clark's estimates.⁹

Certainly, not all that has happened with respect to educational research and the federal government has been controversial or prejorative in nature. Recall the findings of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1969 after its members visited the United States to examine the state of educational research and development in this country. Their report suggests that they were relatively impressed with what they found:

Our first conclusion is that American society has mounted an impressively large effort in educational research and development in a remarkably short period of time. Only, perhaps, in the U.S.A. would that effort be regarded as trivially small and highly controversial.¹⁰

N.L. Gage in responding to recent criticisms of educational research, including skepticism within the membership of AERA about what has been achieved and what can be achieved, characterizes such discussion as a kind of "weltschmerz chic." He goes on to assert that there are important and consistently found main effects in educational research and predicts improved research synthesis in the 1980's.¹¹ Somewhat optimistic, Maxine Greene in an address to those celebrating the 75th anniversary of the College of Education, The Ohio State University suggested a need to develop a policy for educational research that reaffirms the American dream. To her, "The first thing is not to despair."¹²

While debate is no stranger to AERA, federal educational research policy or the field in general, there may be a need to structure debate in our association in a way that involves representatives from all corners of AERA membership and focuses on the ongoing development of a well articulated strategy or policy relative to federal support for educational research. Such structure should seek input from various relevant reference groups, even, perhaps especially,

groups outside of our association. In the process we must use debate to help us take control and shape as much of our future as possible. In the past we have often reacted to debate, sometimes been victims of debate. It may be high time for us to harness debate in a way that makes us and consequently GPLC more effective advocates for our field and its potential contributions to society. If we don't, who will?

I say this not because this kind of suggestion was implicit in our charge, or as a result of some overzealous attachment to AERA or educational research, but simply because it seems to be a good policy direction and consistent with at least some of the literature about institutions facing challenges like rising costs, declining resources, perhaps even a somewhat hostile socio-political environment. Ralph Tyler recently recalled that public attacks on American education seem to increase during times of austerity, particularly recalling their severity during the Depression in the 1930's.¹³ We may be witnessing similar pressures from various points in society today.¹⁴ While it would probably would not be wise to build AERA policy with only the present in mind, an AERA policy that identifies the essential dimensions of what educational research needs to do and articulates strategies to help us accomplish those things seems to be a necessary step, important now and in the future.

Many organizations that are successful, particularly during hard times, are successful through innovation and effective lobbying for their interests. The kind of debate and policy making suggested above, if skillfully structured, may result in both of these happening. Perhaps AERA's policy forum which helps congressional committees identify witnesses, prepare testimony and receive recent research findings is a step in that direction. Steps taken recently by AERA to develop closer working relationships with those who may directly or indirectly benefit from educational research may also be a move in that

direction. (e.g. AERA's Organization of Institutional Affiliates). However, such steps may fall short without a clear vision of ourselves and our purposes and without also involving our entire membership more in policy making and implementation. This has been a goal of AERA in the past and seems at least as important now.

Some Issues

Consistent with our charge from Lynch, this paper addresses four issues. First, this writer considers the level of federal support for NIE and other agencies necessary to sustain an adequate level of educational research by a diverse population of scholars. Second, I suggest means by which federal resources, including those of NIE, might be apportioned to competent researchers. Third, this writer proposes processes which could be used by NIE in securing responses to and in approving proposals for grants and contracts. Fourth, I review modes of communication to educational practitioners of findings from research and evaluation efforts funded by NIE and other federal agencies.

Before discussion of these issues, I think it advisable to share some basic points of view from which the following positions are derived. First, I think that educational research is a viable and worthwhile endeavor, an endeavor legitimately conducted by universities, public and private agencies and institutions and by independent scholars. It is all to the good that educational research includes various epistemological orientations and numerous insights about what should be researched. Research, like most work, requires sustained, systematic, disciplined efforts by investigators following important and established lines of inquiry in which one study builds on another. I am not overly concerned about whether such inquiry is aimed at the development of law-like propositions¹⁴ or action research which usually begins with someone's idea about how to do something better¹⁶ or longitudinal evaluation efforts.¹⁷

Each, when seriously undertaken, exhibits the characteristics noted above and should be supported as crucial to knowledge development.

Applied research and evaluation, short-term, often "one-shot" projects that address national, contemporary policy issues and pressures from legitimate social interest groups are necessary and an appropriate undertaking for a federal educational research agency. This research is necessary even though it often addresses categories that "freeze" over time. For example, by the time such research projects are completed, researchers often find their sponsors responding to a different set of social interests. With new thrusts in the making, sponsors pay little attention to the research fundings for which they lobbied.¹⁸ Even so, it is clearly in the best interests of the research community that these studies are well done and reasonably supported, particularly in the light of their relatively high visibility. On the other hand, NIE must avoid making these activities the predominant focus of its activities. The predominant focus of the research community must be the nurturance of on-going inquiry that builds incrementally knowledge base in education.

There are three other types of activities regularly addressed by NIE: development activities, activities directed toward improved educational practice and dissemination of educational information and research findings. The operation and improvement of a national system of dissemination, such as the ERIC system, clearly is appropriate for the federal government and a necessary means of linking research findings with those in the field who need such information. Given the rapid development of information technology, this may be an area marked by substantial success in the future.

In the past, development activities and improved practice activities have consumed a substantial portion of NIE funds. In this paper, the position that

such activities are desirable and worthwhile, but in the future better undertaken and supported by state and local agencies is taken. Such a position maintains that such activities have the most potential for success when local entities enter into such activities as a means of addressing particular problems or concerns in their region. In this light we can recall RAND Corporation's well-known study of categorical aid programs designed to nurture innovative practices in schools and the RAND finding that examples of successful implementation were usually characterized by a "problem-solving orientation" often applied by local educators before federal monies became available. Given national political and economic trends, recent forecasts of "megatrends", suggesting a movement toward an information-oriented economy and a decentralized government, such a policy for NIE may be a case of "riding a horse in the direction that it is going." Such trends toward decentralization of enterprise are probably more than just reflection of the present Reagan administration and therefore may in the foreseeable future make such a suggestion viable.¹⁹

Level of Federal Support

Basic Research

David Krathwohl recently addressed the issue of funding for educational research in the '80s, particularly the funding of basic research. He noted that the educational research community has been concerned with the under funding of educational research in general in the '70s and a personal fear that basic research in the '80s would be even more grossly underfunded. He recalled that the National Council on Educational Research (NCER) committee had recommended that 20 percent of NIE's research funds be allocated for basic research, the adoption of this policy by NCER, and NIE compliance. During the Spring, 1980, Krathwohl in testifying before Paul Simon's select committee found that

(1) advocates for various social concerns regularly press Congress for their special interests; (2) these interests, including research interests, are usually forced to compete with one another as a means of sorting out priorities and subsequent allocation of funds; and (3) the idea of a set aside for educational research based on a percentage of the Federal education budget is probably not viable given the political realities of handling various and competing social concerns, but that the notion of putting basic research on such a set-aside basis is a more attractive one to Congressmen.²⁰

While Krathwohl noted that applied research can often be justified in terms of its anticipated outcomes, basic research instead is justified as leading to an increased future understanding of the world around us. Since each application of basic knowledge presses the limits of basic knowledge available, Krathwohl argued that we should "depreciate" the cost of building basic knowledge in order to provide funds for its restoration. Just as industry depreciated its capital base, the setting aside of a certain percentage of each year's total education budget for basic educational research can be considered as an investment in the future. He suggested that half of a percentage point of the Department of Education budget as a realistic goal for the '80s. Using the 1980 budget, that would provide \$75 million, a figure close to the entire NIE budget for 1980.²¹ While this seems to be too much to hope for in light of the 1983-84 NIE budget reduction to \$46 million, the notion of a set-aside percentage for basic research seems to make sense and is worthy of our efforts in making it a structural feature of federal educational research policy.

Dissemination, Applied Research and Evaluation

In addition to basic research, the development of an improved national dissemination network, continuance of applied research focusing on national policy concerns and evaluation programs like the National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP) should be basic components of NIE operations and funding. These operations seem to be within the legitimate domain parameters of a federal agency like NIE. As proposed earlier, development activities and programs for improved practice, activities which often consume approximately half of NIE funds should continue to receive scrutiny as activities more appropriately and effectively conducted by state and local governments.²²

"While the direction of the education system remains primarily the responsibility of state and local governments, the Federal Government has a clear responsibility to provide leadership in the conduct and support of scientific inquiry into the educational process." This statement, from Section 405 of the General Education Provisions Act as amended, 20 U.S. Code 1221e, outlining the mission of NIE, clearly notes a predominant role for state and local governments along with a leadership role for the Federal Government with respect to stimulating scientific inquiry. It defines the advancement of practice, and the construction of an effective national research and development system as specific goals of NIE.²³

Consistent with this mission statement for NIE and not unlike present policy, I would like to propose a continued leadership role for NIE, but one which in a more focused way limits itself to stimulating basic research, national programs of evaluation, an improved national dissemination system and applied research on priority national policy issues. This is not to specify NIE as the only actor with respect to these activities, but one of many working together, a force whose role is by legal mandates to provide leadership where it is needed. Such an agenda would not include development and improved practice efforts that have been prominent in the past. However, there would be no prohibition against NIE working with state and local governments to help them become the basic instruments for educational development and improved practice.

While it may be presumptuous to suggest the specific structure for development and improved practice activities conducted by state and local governments as part of a national system of research and evaluation, as an example, one might envision the creation of a state educational laboratory as part of the State Department of Education and satellite agencies or field sites that compose a state and local system of applied research, development, evaluation and professional improvement. The federal government would probably help bear the startup costs for such a transition, and later, NIE, through a national dissemination network, would help supply research findings and possibly brokering of expertise to support development activities of help disseminate results of state and local development efforts. Much of this kind of structure is already in progress and in place. Many states have development projects in progress conducted by the State Department of Education. Most obvious are program efforts in special education, competency testing and vocational education. Teacher centers, state intermediate units and many school districts have been accumulating a wealth of experience and expertise with development and improved practice programs at the local level.

Increased Funding of NIE

I am in agreement with Krathwohl and the members of Paul Simon's Congressional committee that activities funded by NIE, with the possible exception of basic research, ought not be calculated as a set-aside percentage of the Department of Education budget.²⁴ Instead, AERA should continue to work toward federal funding of NIE activities so that adequate support exists. Even with the transfer of virtually all NIE development and improved practice programs to state and local governments, it is probable that NIE would require an increased level of funding for its expanded research and dissemination role.

As an initial goal, I would suggest an AERA effort to raise NIE funding to the amount of its initial budget, \$140 million.

I have been told that, as a rule of thumb, anytime the budget of a federal agency goes over \$90 million, some use other figures depending on circumstances, the vulnerability of that agency to budget-cutting efforts inside and outside the government substantially increases. This budgetary visibility threshold, (possibly similar to the notion that increased military rank of a soldier on a battlefield may increase the soldier's attractiveness as an enemy target), suggests that concurrent with efforts to help NIE acquire adequate funding must be efforts to strengthen the political support base required to gain and hold such funding levels. NIE and the research community must be careful to set reasonable expectations about what the nation can expect for such funding. Further, NIE must be prepared to demonstrate its ability and willingness to make structural modifications that suggest that the funding will be well used to better accomplish its mission.

Apportioning of Resources

Mapping Fields of Inquiry

Theodore Melnechuk of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute in a presentation to the Kettering Foundation Research Group, August, 1982, outlined a process for mapping fields of inquiry. He suggested that, from an economic standpoint, there need to be at least 2,000 investigators in a field to support a journal and a scholarly society. Among these investigators there are usually about fifty leaders who are informationally well situated so as to know what is going on in the field. This is true, he said, partly because they are invited to prestigious places as guest speakers where activity is great. These individuals are in key locations within their professional "grapevine" and as a

result know the research efforts in the field as well as emerging works to be published. If one considers the possibility of mapping a field of inquiry, what is important to know--what is known--will be in the minds of these leaders.²⁵

Glancing through the AERA annual report published in the August/September Educational Researcher, 1982, we can note a membership of over 12,000 organized into ten divisions. The 1982 annual meeting involved 2,098 primary speakers, 881 chairs, critics, discussants and reactors, and fifteen guest speakers.²⁶ While we are all familiar with the difficulties involved with comparing inquiry in education with other fields, it appears that as a possible field of inquiry we can be characterized by a number of investigators well over 2,000, invited speakers of the kind noted by Melnechuk, who speak at the annual meeting of AERA and other prestigious places where much communication takes place among researchers and possibly, perhaps inevitably, a grapevine structure.

If such an informal structure exists and based on past research on informal systems,²⁷ it might not be surprising to find informal grouping patterns that mirror AERA division structure. As Melnechuk suggests, we might find key individuals or leaders who are informationally well located and sought out by others because they are trusted interpersonally (sometimes because of sponsorship or shared interests) and respected for their expertise and accomplishments. These people would be in positions to know what is important in the field, what is known and what is going on. NIE staff may be in part tapping this grapevine already when they meet with researchers in organized research agenda. If there is some truth in this speculation, a research effort to map the field we call educational research might be a very informative and worthwhile undertaking. For instance, we might be able to determine the degree to which NIE funding of research and development efforts is congruent with the perceptions of leaders in the field about what is known and what is important.

Such information might be helpful in making effective federal resource allocations in the future, particularly in the area of basic research.

Using Melnorchuk's methodological suggestions, it might be worthwhile to do a rough sketch of how a mapping of the field might take place. NIE could commission a study to be done by noneducational researchers from a cross-section of academic disciplines. Perhaps the starting points for interviewing would be individuals who were invited to do a State of the Art address in each division at the last AERA annual meeting. In preparing for these ten interviews, the researchers would read "the best text," "the latest review of this text," and "a hot article" from each division.²⁹

Interview questions might include: "What is the major claim of your most recent publication?" "What did that research lead to?" "How is the research turning out?" "What are the controversies in the field?" "What are the issues?" "Who says 'yes' and who says 'no', and why?" "What would resolve this controversy?" "Other controversies?" "What else is hot?" "Any anomalies?" "What are the most desired research techniques?" Other questioning might try to identify key figures: "Who is the grand old person of the field?" "Who is the brash upstart?" "Who are the respected mavericks?" "Who are the most promising young researchers in the field?" "Who should I see next?" It is not inconceivable that interviewing could be done by telephone.³⁰ From such data gathering, the researchers might be in a position to document important work and crucial issues in the field of fields of educational research and graphically identify key networks and leaders in the social structure of the field.

There are some obvious methodological problems with such an approach. For instance, the limitations of reputational studies of this kind are well known. If information generated by this approach, at least in part, impacted on the allocation of research funds, the external validity of interview responses would

provide some worry. Certainly the ethical use of such information would be a central concern. While these concerns and others are important, I suspect that there is sufficient talent and expertise available to design and conduct the study effectively. As long as the trade-offs are well documented and methodology is subject to public analysis and disproof, the risks may not outweigh the informational gains for policy analysis and development. I suggest a formal, public mapping of the fields in place of possible informal and confidential efforts at mapping that may already take place in funding groups like NIE, informal processes that may be more vulnerable to some of the methodological concerns noted above.

Aside from the possible advantages of mapping the field, e.g., giving us an understanding of funding patterns in light of the perceived important and concurrent patterns in educational research or simply providing an census of what is known, who is doing what and what needs to be done next, I would like to propose a possible direction for the allocation of basic research monies based on the information provided by the mapping process.

If we were able to identify a core of individuals with records of ongoing, systematic inquiry that could be supported by an observable record of refereed publications, I would argue that in the funding area NIE designates as fundamental or basic research, that these individuals and their work constitutes much of our human and conceptual capital in that area and that they are deserving of sustained federal support. While these people may or may not be members of AERA, I would not be surprised to find that NIE and other external funding agencies have been a factor on the work and careers of many of these individuals. Similarly, I would express little surprise at the possible finding that NIE or other external funding agencies have played little or no part in the careers and work of others in this group.

If as Melnechuk suggests, in a field, 50 such individuals might be identified, the number in our core basic research group might range from 50 (in the event that the mapping designated educational research as the field) to as many as 500 (in the event that the mapping designated the areas covered by each AERA division as ten fields). I would propose that these individuals be designated for five-year terms of support, pending the results of the next regular mapping effort, as NIE's Basic Educational Research Fellows. Each fellow would be offered five years of categorical funding for their research efforts at perhaps \$50,000 per year. Consistent with the call above for .5% of the Department of Education budget for basic research, funding for these fellows would range from \$2.5 to \$25 million--a fraction of the amount available for basic research in the event that .5% target was possible. That would still leave funds available in the NIE basic or fundamental research category for other activities such as NAEP, the mapping project itself or to provide additional monies to Fellows where need is demonstrated by the nature of the work in progress.

Such an allocation pattern would provide a relatively stable base for basic research, a reward system for such behavior on the part of researchers and aspiring researchers and subsequent development of our capacity with respect to basic research. As long as the mapping process is continued, as long as adjustments in this cadre of researchers are possible, as long as there is access to the system for young and promising researchers, even, perhaps especially, those who are seen as mavericks, problems of elitism and exclusivity based on a cult of personality rather than real accomplishments seem likely to be minimal. Here the tradition of competition for funding is alive, based on the demonstration of talent and real accomplishments rather than on factors in the review process beyond the control of the researcher.

RFP Competitions

Competition for funding through the RFP process would be predominantly relevant to applied research focusing on national policy concerns. Congress and NIE must have this vehicle available to meet the needs of various and often competing social interest groups who feel they need a chance to have their concerns considered in terms of the federal educational research agenda. While development activities, as proposed above, would be gradually shifted to state and local laboratories or centers and funded at those levels, state and local agencies would be free to compete, along with anyone else in the field, for these applied research and evaluation monies. Perhaps their strong interest in development would sometimes make them attractive possibilities for certain applied inquiry that could result in direct implications for development or improved practice projects. Whether this is so or not, for reasons noted above, free and open competition appears to be the most appropriate way to handle resource allocation in the area of applied research and evaluation.

Since NIE was created by Congress in 1972, its mission to provide every person an equal opportunity to receive an education of high quality regardless of his race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or social class seems to many to have dominated decision making in all programs. Even though equity is a worthy theme, it has sometimes tended to narrow the scope of NIE's research agenda. In some cases RFP characteristics, proposal review criteria, or the comments of reviewers have reflected a preoccupation with this theme, perhaps at the expense of science. The central criterion that should guide the establishment of research priorities should be that of what is good science, judged by peers. If there is a knowledge gap or promising new idea or avenue of inquiry, then some emphasis should be directed to those areas.³¹

Often the benefits of an avenue of inquiry may not be immediately obvious, anticipated or even intended. This is true for applied research as it is for basic research. To limit research funding to only those areas thought to have direct implications for a particular social theme or mission is to show little appreciation for what history teaches us about the origins of some of our society's most significant inventions and advances in knowledge.

NIE has at least in part tried to address this concern through two program thrusts: field initiated research competitions and small grants competition. For the last couple of years, through FY 81, NIE sponsored grants competitions within predefined topics. Researchers were given discretion to design a study around personally developed ideas so long as it fit these topics. Though they were sometimes illustrative, sometimes clear subsets of a particular subject, the researcher in both cases tended to be restrained from fully and freely conceptualizing an idea. Another version of the field-initiated competition, the unsolicited research program, provided for field-initiated research in its generic sense and promotes the concept of competition to identify the best ideas. Until FY 1982, NIE programs often made provisions for small grants to fund new investigators, pilot studies and small scale projects to break new ground, explore promising ideas and to encourage the development of new researchers and research avenues. In the case of field-initiated research, unsolicited research programs and small grants competitions, funding has been relatively anemic and hardly comparable to similar program funding with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).³²

In terms of future policy directions proposed in this paper, there should be sustained effort by AERA to nurture the development and growth of the NIE unsolicited research program and small grants competition with respect to both basic and applied research and evaluation. Such competition would encourage the

development of new and creative lines of inquiry and provide access to the field by promising investigators with promising new ideas. Two major competitions should be held by NIE on an annual basis; one for basic research and evaluation and one for applied research and evaluation. These trusts should be considered as major subprograms of basic and applied research and evaluation. They should be funded at a level commensurate with such status at NIE and in line with the level of funding provided for similar activities in organizations like NSF or NIH.

NIE Organizational Structure

I have proposed apportioning of NIE resources for (1) basic or fundamental research and evaluation based on an ongoing mapping of the field and funding of established and important lines of inquiry by specific investigators of known competence, (2) applied research and evaluation that address current social interests and national educational policy concerns based on RFP competitions, (3) unsolicited research programs and small grants competitions on an annual basis as important subprograms of basic and applied research and evaluation to nurture promising new ideas and researchers, and (4) the operation of an improved national dissemination system which would support development and improved practice programs that would be transferred to state and local governments. The implications of this policy for the formal organization of NIE would involve reorganization of the agency into three major units: basic research and evaluation, applied research and evaluation, and dissemination. Earlier I called for an NIE budget of \$140 million with about \$75 million for basic research and the remainder for applied research and dissemination. It is probably beyond the scope of this paper to propose specific percentages of budget figures beyond the figures already mentioned. Having said this, let me make some brief comments about the regional laboratories and centers.

The Research and Development Centers and Regional Educational Laboratories typically account for approximately one-third of NIE's annual budget. This has been in terms of set-aside funds, but more recently the idea of set-aside funding seems to be under criticism and the possibility of allowing open competition for hosting these institutions has become a recently emphasized policy alternative. These entities exist by Congressional mandate and are often criticized and praised by those in the field.

Generally speaking, centers were to focus on research and labs on dissemination. This distinction is difficult to observe in their operations today. Both seem to be regularly involved in research and dissemination. Often the two directions are hard to separate since some important research on dissemination appears to be needed and in progress. Certainly, research agencies must be involved in dissemination to some extent. I will not seek to force such definitions of mission on these institutions. Instead, I will initially respond to their research orientation in terms of the recommendation for mapping of the field.

Given the policy proposals put forth above, I would argue for continuance of those labs and centers that could show via the mapping of the field the presence of important researchers and research. Where this is the case and these individuals can make a strong argument for continuing their research in this organizational arrangement, NIE should give serious consideration to continued support. Apparently, based on recent evaluation results,³² this might well be the case with many of the labs and centers. In these instances, the lab or center would be funded to do basic research and would have the option to compete for applied research and evaluation through the RFP process. I would continue to argue that development and improved practice programs are best placed with state and local governments and should not be a part of the mission

of labs and centers. The labs and centers have been involved in State Capacity Building Grants and regional services for some time now and for a short-term probably could be given significant responsibility for a smooth transfer of development and improved practice programs to state and local governments.

As a result of mapping, some labs and centers may find it difficult to justify a research mission. Since, as argued here, development and improved practice projects should be transferred to state and local governments, these agencies may wish to involve themselves in transition activities. More likely, they will either disappear or develop a mission that places them clearly in the business of contributing to an improved national system of dissemination, perhaps as units that deliver the necessary knowledge base to support local development and improved practice efforts. This may not be too unlike the activities presently conducted by some of these agencies. The difference is that under such circumstances each lab and center clearly knows what business it is in. Labs or centers that have demonstrated capacity for a research mission emphasize research. Other labs and centers would contribute as dissemination vehicles or probably choose to disband. The mapping process encourages these institutions to "vote with their feet" in terms of their mission rather than forcing, for example, labs that are doing strong research to desist and return to a dissemination mission.

Since some of the surviving labs and centers in operation under the proposed scheme presented in this paper would emphasize basic research, a set-aside policy to support their research and researchers identified in mapping would seem appropriate, probably on a five-year cycle pending a new mapping of the field. On the other hand, competition by various institutions for the presence of such a lab or center based on the ability to show they could provide for more efficient and effective management would seem less desirable. The

presence of key research and researchers is the justification for a lab or center, efficient and effective management is important but without key research and researchers it is meaningless.

One might suspect that under such circumstances we could see increased efforts, perhaps by competing universities, to lure key individuals to their campus with promises of more resources and higher salaries as a means of securing the presence of a particularly prestigious lab or center and its research activities. We are already seeing this kind of occurrence in some fields outside of education. While I have serious doubts that this would be a phenomenon of the same proportions in the field of education, this proposal may be worth trying if only to see if this kind of prestige is possible in education. A problem, perhaps, but not so threatening that we can't cross that bridge when we come to it.

The labs and centers that choose to emphasize dissemination would receive three to five year contracts related to total federal funding for an improved national system of dissemination. Their operations and continued support would be based on evaluation results suggesting effectiveness in dissemination, not on a mapping of research fields. Through the RFP process they would have the option to compete for monies that are directly related to their dissemination mission.

Improving the RFP Process

Having made such proposals, it is important to keep in mind suggestions by interested parties in the field for the possible improvement of NIE RFP development and review processes. Linda Meadows, who monitors the educational research area for the Research Foundation at The Ohio State University and other colleagues have expressed the following suggestions. Let me echo them here as a means toward enhancing discussion that may lead to an improved RFP development

and review process. Two specific areas of concern are (1) the possible listing of study section members who are to read proposals and (2) the nature of the feedback by reviewers to those submitting proposals.

A couple of the grants competition announcements in FY 81 included a list of study section members who would be reading proposals. Apparently, NSF and NIH routinely announce this information. While few would suggest revealing the identities of the reviewers of a specific proposal, it would seem to be helpful to proposal writers to know the range of individuals and orientations represented in the composition of the study section. It would help researchers confirm that a specific application has been appropriately targeted and it would probably be helpful to know the audience for which they are writing. Apparently, reviewer information has often been difficult or impossible to obtain. The referenced lists appear to be a step in the right direction and this practice needs to be expanded in the future.³⁴

The quality of reviews is another important issue. Sometimes there is a feeling among researchers that reviews appear superficial and presented at an elementary level with as little as a single sentence, yielding little or no critical insight. Some critiques appear to be prepared with minimal thought or concern for providing feedback to the proposal writer. Apparently, it is rare to find comments which identify strengths and weaknesses so authors can consider revising and resubmitting the proposal. Further, some individuals have experienced considerable delay in getting feedback, even after follow-up discussions are initiated by the authors.³⁵ This process apparently needs improvement. Whether it requires more resources for NIE or technical improvements in the feedback process or efforts to correct misperceptions of those in the field who note the problems above, NIE cannot afford to have such perceptions continue. Certainly, some of the proposals made in this paper would

have little chance of success in the event these perceptions about feedback persist.

Communication of Findings

ERIC Improvement

The notion of a national dissemination effort operated by a federal education agency can be traced back to the late 1950s. At that time, Roy Hall and later David Clark recognized the inadequacy and political liability of a weak system of disseminating the latest research findings to educators and educational institutions throughout the nation. Out of these concerns came the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). Beginning in 1965 as a result of increased funding of ESEA and the leadership of Lee Burchinal and Thomas Clemens, clearinghouses abstracted documents, indexed, developed newsletters, reviews, and provided consultant services, reference work and other services for the field. This decentralization of services seemed to allow specialists to serve ERIC and still remain close to their fields and institutions; concurrently special interest groups developed a vested interest in ERIC. While ERIC probably has its detractors, the growth of ERIC, its sheer volume, annual increases in subscriptions to Research in Education and increasing use of the system suggests that the system is an impressive accomplishment.³⁶ Combined with the impressive array of educational journals available, search systems like BLISS and annual meetings of research and other associations in this country, one can easily take the position that with respect to dissemination systems the cup is half full rather than half empty.

Still with almost twenty years of experience with ERIC and much more experience with things like journals and annual conferences we still hear the same criticisms that spurred Hall, Clark, and others to begin to develop a national dissemination system. We hear, as Lynch suggests, that the complaint

exists that professors, administrators and teachers can't use research findings because there appears not to be a good dissemination system in operation. John Corbally claims that part of the problem is that the educational research community has set unrealistically high expectations for educational research and development and its possible impact on educational practice--even if dissemination were effectively conducted. He also notes that school administrators and teachers, operating in an often hectic and interaction intensive environment have little time to read about research results. Even so, he speculates that these individuals value their professionalism, want and sometimes generate new ideas.³⁷ If there is some truth in his comments and I suspect there is, we can readily understand why an ambivalence of frustration and support in educational practice continue for research and development efforts.

My guess is that the kind of ambivalence noted above is likely to be with us for a long time. It usually has two foci: questions about the adequacy of written word dissemination and questions about the theory-practice relationship. It is likely to persist even with improved research and dissemination in education. Much of the anxiety generated by this ambivalence seems healthy, e.g., anxiety generated by the realities of practice and a desire for new ideas and helpful insights. Two things seem important to keep in mind: 1) the need to understand, keep in perspective and value the anxieties of those in the field as a means toward improved research and dissemination, and, 2) the need not to despair or underestimate the ability of the field to find the time to rise above the its own work environment, read and use educational research and development results. Consequently, the position is taken here that we should continue development and support of ERIC and consider the following as possible policy

directions. They are not presented in any order of priority but as ideas worth exploring.

Improved Technology

Knowledge use and educational improvement projects as part of NIE dissemination efforts have focused on: how schools mobilize for improvement, what processes schools undergo throughout the improvement effort, how teachers, principals and others acquire and use knowledge related to work and how characteristics of the school influence these processes. It seems prudent to continue these types of activities as a means of improving dissemination systems. Certain labs and centers that are not directly involved in a research mission might be prominent in such activities. Consistent with the tradition of NIE and ERIC concurrent efforts should be made to use of advances in information sciences such as computer assistance, teleconferencing as well as information systems technology for better organization and dissemination of research findings.

Making Claims Explicit

An interesting suggestion with respect to the organization of information for dissemination made by Melnechuk involves the suggested need to make the central claims of a research project explicit in the reporting of findings. For instance, textbooks or journals might be improved by making claims explicit, providing supportive material and making the table of contents a propositional inventory. Some reviews of research already do this. Journals, ERIC and other dissemination vehicles might consider requiring authors to use the title of their articles to state their major claim. If this could be done, the table of contents of each journal or ERIC publication would be a listing of claims or propositions. This would aid readers in finding what they are searching for and help move toward machine storage and retrieval of maps of knowledge. While many

authors might feel restricted by such a titling rule, a possible compromise might involve the requirement that the central claim(s) of a paper must be in the first sentence(s) of a required abstract. In such a system rewards ought to support explicitness.³⁸

Conferencing

The mapping of the field called for earlier in this paper may also have additional benefits for dissemination. For example, if mapping disclosed networks of researchers and important lines of inquiry, it may be worthwhile to use such information in developing a conferencing strategy on a national or regional level whereby individuals working on similar or related lines of inquiry could meet, exchange findings, ideas or useful methodologies. Such a network arrangement might not only lead to improved dissemination but also might be also understood as a major effort in capacity building in educational research. Certainly, much of this already goes on at the annual meeting of AERA both formally and informally but I suspect that mapping of the field(s) could improve these processes by making sure that strong matches of interests take place.³⁹

A concern that I've heard from colleagues about NIE sponsored conferences is that they are not usually announced in the Federal Register or through other dissemination means. This is a concern because many interested researchers and practitioners apparently claim that they rarely have an opportunity to participate. Monographs of conference papers or proceedings often are issued long after the events take place. These reports are usually quite well done but tend to hide in the fugitive literature.⁴⁰ If these perceptions are at least in part accurate, a system which involves mapping the field(s) of inquiry, setting up a networking strategy that accurately matches interests, facilitates

participation and speeds documentation of conference or workshop proceedings to interested parties is worthwhile and deserving of consideration by NIE.

A Journal of Funded Projects

Among its publications, NIE needs to consider the publication of a journal of funded research so that the field may be informed about what is going to be investigated. Given the proposals in this paper, such a journal would probably publish reports of research initiated with respect to basic research and evaluation as well as proposals funded in RFP competitions. Further, new inquiries supported through small grants and unsolicited research competitions would also be documented here. The audience for such a journal would be policy makers, researchers and practitioners. Each would have reason to be interested in new research initiatives and their results.⁴¹

Conclusion

In this paper I have taken the position that NIE should be preserved but restructured somewhat to strengthen its mandated role of leadership with respect to educational research and development. I have suggested that AERA support efforts to maintain and build NIE. Proposed are a major commitment to basic research and evaluation based on a mapping of the field; continued RFP competition for applied research in response to national policy concerns; support of small grants and unsolicited programs as major subprograms for basic and applied research; the continued development of ERIC and a national dissemination network; and the transfer of development activities and most improved practice programs to state and local governments. While such restructuring suggests a trimming of budget, this is not the case in this proposal. Educational research at the federal level has been grossly underfunded and this paper calls for efforts to restore NIE to at least the \$140

million level of its initial funding. It is suggested that efforts be made to develop a political support base to gain and hold such resources.

If my sources are correct, NIE's budget is around \$48 million and just "missed by a hair" of being abolished this year. Donald Lambro, one of NIE's severest critics in the press, recently called NIE "...an obscure and wasteful research agency in the Department of Education..." and nominated its former director Edward Curran for a mythical "most heroic award" for his efforts to abolish this agency. Lambro, in the tradition of the "golden fleece awards" cites examples of research and development on issues of contemporary social concern as examples of waste. His argument is that NIE should be abolished because its supports research on important but low priority topics.⁴² That such critics do not instead argue for better research or reordering of priorities rather than abolition of the agency suggests that such critics may not understand the possible value of educational research, are not sure that we know what we are doing and doubt that we have the political support to repel calls that essentially ask with respect to NIE that we throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Instead, in this paper positions are taken suggesting that the educational research community should support NIE and work toward modification of its structure so that it may improve its service. It is no secret that some dissatisfaction exists within the research community about NIE policies. We need to discuss alternatives that will lead to a well-defined policy toward federal support for educational research. In the end, I suspect that I have more confidence in the wisdom derived from such debate than even the positions advanced here. They are advanced as one contribution toward such discussions.

Footnotes

¹For instance, Richard A. Dersheimer, The Federal Government and Educational R & D (Lexington, Mass. Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Company, 1976) is an example of such an effort.

²David H. Florio, "Protecting the Integrity of Research," Educational Researcher, October, 1982, pp. 26-28.

³Dirshimer, p. 133.

⁴Educational Researcher, October, 1982, pp. 11-19 and November, 1982, pp. 12-18.

⁵Dirshimer, pp. 92-93.

⁶Dirshimer, p. 122.

⁷Dirshimer, pp. 124-125.

⁸David L. Clark, "Research and Development Productivity in Educational Organizations," Occasional Paper No. 41, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, March, 1978.

⁹"Increasing the Research Productivity of Schools of Education: A Policy Inquiry," a report prepared for the National Institute of Education under provision of a contract awarded to Sylvia B. Tucker, Oregon State University, March, 1981.

¹⁰"Educational Research and Development in the United States, Examiners Report and questions," Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel, Educational Policy Review, 12th November 1969, Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, STP (69), 10, p. 241.

¹¹N.L. Gage, Educational Researcher, October, 1982, as part of the series by former AERA presidents entitled, "The Future of Educational Research," pp. 11-12.

¹²Maxine Greene, "Educational Research and National Policy," keynote address, 75th Anniversary, The Ohio State University College of Education, August 3, 1982.

¹³Ralph Tyler, "Comments by Ralph Tyler," Educational Researcher, December, 1982, p. 10.

¹⁴Ronald G. Corwin and Karen Seashore Lewis, "Organizational Barriers to the Utilization of Research," Administrative Science Quarterly, December, 1982, pp. 623-640 describes certain NIE projects on local improvement projects as well as NIE structure that inhibits such projects.

¹⁵Fred Kerlinger, "The influence of Research on Educational Practice," Educational Researcher, September, 1977, pp. 5-12, and Patrick Suppes, "The Place of Theory in Educational Research," Educational Researcher, June, 1973, pp. 3-10.

¹⁶Joseph J. Schwab, "The Practical: Arts if Eclectic," School Review, August, 1971, pp. 493-542.

¹⁷See Archie E. LaPointe and Stephen L. Koffler, "Your Standards or Mine? The Case for the National Assessment of Educational Progress," Educational Researcher, December, 1982, pp. 4-9.

¹⁸One obvious example would be Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, The National Commission on Excellence in Education, Washington, D.C., April, 1983.

¹⁹John Naisbitt, Megatrends (New York: Warner Books, 1982) pp. 97-120 makes this analysis and forecast.

²⁰David R. Krathwohl, Educational Researcher, October, 1982, as part of the series by former AREA presidents entitled, "The Future of Educational Research," pp. 13-15.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Corwin and Lewis.

²³Fifth Report of the National Council on Educational Research, NIE, Fiscal Years 1978-1979.

²⁴Krathwohl, p. 14.

²⁵Ted Melnechuk, Western Behavioral Science Institute, Department of Neurosciences, School of Medicine, University of California San Diego, presentation to the Kettering Foundation Research Group, August, 1982, Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio.

²⁶1981-82 Annual Report, Educational Researcher, August-September, 1982, pp. 16-17.

²⁷For example see Richard O. Carlson, Adoption of Educational Innovations, Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, Eugene, Oregon, 1965 or Joseph Licata and Walter Hack, "School Administrator Grapevine Structure," Educational Administration Quarterly, Winter, 1980.

²⁸Melnechuk.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Comments from Linda Meadows, Research Center, The Ohio State University, 1982.

³²Ibid.

³³Summary of these evaluation results appear in the Fifth Report of the National Council on Educational Research, pp. 20-21.

³⁴Meadows.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Dirshimer, pp. 108-109.

³⁷Comments by John E. Corbally, "Report of the Chairman," the Fifth Report of the National Council on Educational Research, pp. 1-3.

³⁸Melnechuk.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Meadows.

⁴¹Melnechuk.

⁴²Donald Lambro, "The Best and the Worst of 1982's Institutions," United Feature Syndicate, December 13, 1982.